

Family Farming Matters

“Joining the YALI Network helped me access online courses. And discussions by members give me a vista of ideas and actions for social entrepreneurship in Africa.”

— Ariel Djomakon

Ariel Djomakon, a blogger and entrepreneur from Cotonou, Benin, believes that “family farming matters.” This YALI Network member wants to convince other young Africans he’s right.

In 2014, Djomakon and some friends created the blog “[Let’s Be a Farmer](#),” encouraging African youth to learn more about farming. “The goal is to enhance the image of the African farmer whose daily job is about feeding others, but who happens to be the poorest and least recognized in our societies,” he writes in his blog.

“To do that, we wanted to create a Web-based community platform which would help connect, virtually and physically, two different social groups — farming communities and aspiring young entrepreneurs. ... It would also help farmer organizations to promote their daily work and to share their challenges and innovations,” Djomakon says. Establishing a line of communication between these two groups also “will provide youth with useful tools that may allow them to explore job opportunities in the agri-rural sector,” the blogger writes.

Let’s Be a Farmer also promotes agricultural entrepreneurship and the empowerment of rural women, Djomakon says.

To help youth learn to appreciate family farmers, Let’s Be a Farmer recruited 120 nonfarm Beninese youth to go to rural areas and visit with men and women farmers, ranchers and agriprocessors. The farmers taught the youth different agricultural production techniques, then had them try their hands at ploughing, weeding, milking cows and even preparing akassa, a fermented maize dough.

Ariel Djomakon



The training, which Djomakon says had the support of the U.S. Embassy in Cotonou and several local youth-education nonprofit organizations, ended with a short instructional course on agricultural entrepreneurship.

Djomakon says he and his peers are working to scale up the project and offer youth practical training in agrirural entrepreneurship and resources to help them launch rural enterprises. So far, he says the blog has hundreds of regular readers from 80 countries.

He says agriculture and rural services “offer the best opportunities to move out of poverty and build satisfying lives” for young Africans.

According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), which designated 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming, family and small-scale farms are important because they do these things:

- Contribute to global food security.
- Preserve traditional food products while contributing to a balanced diet.
- Safeguard the world's agro-biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources.
- Boost local economies.

A graduate in international relations from the University of Paris-Sud, Djomakon worked four years as head of sustainable agriculture at the local nonprofit YPA Development, or Youth Partnership and Agricultural Development. He then co-founded RurAg Services, a group venture that delivers services to and invests in rural areas, with the goal of connecting farming communities with "aspiring young agri-rural entrepreneurs."

"Joining the YALI Network helped me [access online courses](#). And discussions by members give me a vista of ideas and actions for social entrepreneurship in Africa," he says.

The Let's Be a Farmer blog echoes recommendations from other knowledgeable people in African agriculture about the opportunities available in the future of agriculture. Business expansion expert Madison Ayer of Honey Care Africa held a recent [Facebook chat](#) with the YALI Network to explain the promising business opportunities that agricultural enterprises can offer.

Benin Gardeners Tap Land and Water to Create a Small Business

YALI has "opened me to a way to dream. ... With YALI I'm living again, hopeful and ever determined."


— Benin gardener Gabin Covo

When YALI Network member Gabin Covo moved from the village of Samionta to the city of Bohicon in Benin in 2012, "it was not possible to farm due to the lack of water resources," he says. Then "one day, a friend informed me about a fountain flowing freely in another village about 24 kilometers from Bohicon. Excited, we rushed there to see whether it were possible to install a garden nearby. To our great surprise, we were granted a plot" by local officials.

The 33-year-old and two older friends started to turn the 1,200-square-meter plot into a thriving garden. They formed seedbeds, then bought two water pipes. They connected one end of a narrow pipe to the fountain faucet and joined the other end to a wider pipe. The combination reached their plot, and they installed taps to which they connected garden hoses to carry water directly to the plants. Finally, they buried the pipes in shallow soil to protect them from rust and breakage.

Once they could bring water to the seedbeds, they planted eggplant, known locally as gboma, cucumbers, pawpaw and peppers. "Our choice of products went to local vegetables [that are] easy to

cultivate and easy to sell," he says.

Gabin Covo stands  near the garden he and friends brought to life by piping water to it.

Overall, the garden materials and piping cost \$150, which they borrowed from friends. "A one-time investment," Covo says. The new gardeners have been able to pay back half of the loan and expect to pay off the rest after their second harvest.

The pipes also have benefited plants outside the garden. "Within some weeks, the big bush near the fountain became green and flourishing, to the great surprise of the villagers," he says.

About three months after starting the garden, Covo and his friends were selling their crops in Bohicon and making money. Villagers also come directly to the garden to buy their food. "That is how we are enjoying a good experience, by raising a small business in a region where water resources are limited," he says.

The friends also learned that gardening for profit has its challenges. "The distance between the village and the city, for instance," Govo notes, is an obstacle to transporting their product to market. But they knew that was a circumstance they needed to accept.

The success of the first garden plot provided a springboard to expansion. Town officials granted the friends a second plot, doubling the size of the land they could cultivate. To diversify their product line, they are digging ponds so they can raise fish. They want to grow moringa oleifera, "a vegetable well-known for its virtues as food complement," Covo notes.

"I don't own land, but I know how to create riches with it," Covo says. "For fellows that are considering agriculture as a career, to succeed you need to make sure you have water steadily. This is the most important resource."

"You also need to study your environment to prevent any attack that will affect your production," he says. He recommends studying the soil's health to determine the best crops to plant and knowing which insects and diseases may be present in the soil or in the area to know how to protect crops from them.

Covo's experience of starting small, reinvesting and understanding supply needs follows the advice of a business expansion expert who held a recent [Facebook chat](#) with the YALI Network. Madison Ayer of Honey Care Africa offers a step-by-step plan on how small growers can transform a subsistence farm into a commercial business.

Turn a Family Farm into a Profit Center


“If they can market what they grow to their neighbors and make a living doing it, they can enrich their lives and those of their neighbors.”

– John Grovin, Wisconsin family farmer

With a mix of specialty crops, livestock and some savvy-marketing, small-scale family farming can be profitable. As the population grows more urbanized, it turns out U.S. farmers are finding that city folks and their children like to come visit the farm for fun and learning.

Corporate agriculture on a vast scale has come to dominate the U.S. farming sector in recent decades, and small family-farms have had a hard time remaining competitive and profitable. By developing a new model for their farms and finding new customers, some U.S. farmers are proving their small operations can carve out a profitable niche in the marketplace.

These U.S. growers have lessons to share with their African counterparts as the latter attempt to progress beyond mere subsistence farming to become commercial enterprises.

A YALI Network member takes a turn  picking strawberries at Govin's Meats and Berries during a 2014 visit.

Mandela Washington Fellows members saw a modern, profit-making operation made from a small farm when they visited Govins Meats and Berries in Menomonie, Wisconsin, a few months ago. Answering questions from the African visitors, owners John and Julie Govin explained how their business has evolved and how they make money.

Question: Why did you choose to be farmers?

John: I grew up a dairy farmer. Julie was a university marketing major.

Julie: I grew up in a city suburb but I knew farming was the lifestyle I wanted.

Q. How did you finance your farm?

Govins: The seller gave us good terms and our bank backed us up. We've expanded and borrowed along the way. We have always been able to pay back our loans. Our farm is 65 acres (26 hectares) — the right size for the two of us to handle.

Q: What do you grow?

Govins: Cattle and sheep, which we sell for meat, and chickens for meat and eggs. We have six acres [2.5 hectares] of strawberries.

Q. How does your farm make money?

Govins: Through direct sales to customers and through agrotourism. People like to know how their

food is raised and will pay to see where it comes from.

In the spring, we invite people to visit our lambing barn. City people like to see animal births. We charge a fee for visitors to watch lambs being born.

We have goats, ponies, and even alpacas, a camel-like animal from South America. Children like to pet them. We also have educational signs throughout the barn that teach people about the animals.

In late spring, people pay to pick their own baskets of strawberries straight from the field. Or they can buy already-picked fresh berries. The arrival of the strawberry crop is a big attraction. The fellows asked if we replant strawberry seeds the next season. We said that instead every year we buy strawberry tissue cultures from a certified strawberry nursery to replant.

In the fall, we cut a decorative pattern in a maize field for people to walk through (comparable to a path through a garden maze of hedges). That is another way to generate tourist income. We bought another property and decorated the barn to rent out for weddings.

Q. Where do you market your products?

Govins: We are in a good location near a major highway. We have a large sign next to the highway directing drivers to the farm. That brings in a lot of business.

We sell our meats at an open air market in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, 22 miles [35 kilometers] away. More than 100,000 people live within 80 miles [129 kilometers] of our farm.


We use print flyers and social media to advertise our products. Word-of-mouth is another big promoter.

Q: How many employees do you have?

Govins: One full-time and up to 20 seasonal employees. They are all neighbors and friends.

Q: How do you keep your fields fresh?

Govins: Through crop rotation, which allows nutrients to replenish the soil. After two or three years we take the strawberries out and plant a cover crop of wheat, or pumpkins or sweet corn for a couple years. We then plant strawberries on another plot.

YALI Network members take a break 
with Jim Govin, center, rear.

Q: What is your farming method?

Govins: We are conventional farmers. Fertilizer goes on everything, and herbicides and pesticides when needed.

When they visited in summer 2014, we took the Mandela Washington Fellows to a neighbor's irrigated corn field. The corn was nine feet [2.8 meters] tall. It looked beautiful. They looked at the soil and wondered how the ground could be so clear and free of weeds. It was planted with genetically modified seed that resists weeds.


Q: What is your advice for young Africans considering farming?

Govins: If they can market what they grow to their neighbors and make a living doing it, they can enrich their lives and those of their neighbors. For many of them, that's their goal.

Identifying a competitive edge and the needs of specific customers are key strategies for African farmers who strive to expand a small farm to become a commercial enterprise. An executive at Honey Care Africa is helping East African beekeepers grow their businesses and offers a few tips on how to get there in this [blog post](#).

Growing Prosperity in African Agriculture

Hundreds of YALI Network members joined a [Facebook chat](#) about how to make farming more productive and profitable in Africa with Madison Ayer. Ayer is the chairman and chief executive officer of [Honey Care Africa](#), a successful honey production and distribution value chain. He is helping beekeepers create sustainable and productive enterprises in Kenya, South Sudan and Tanzania.

The Farm Shop gives growers reliable  access to the supplies they need to produce a crop.

Ayer's strategy for successful farming is that growers must make accurate calculations of production requirements and outputs they'll deliver at harvest. Achieving precision in tracking those accounts will allow them to evolve from smallholder enterprises to successful commercial businesses.

"Without the right seeds, fertilizers, and other tools, smallholder farmers stand little chance of producing a sufficient harvest," said Ayer. "However, with access to the right products and methods, smallholder farmers can become very successful. The farmers must view it as a real business, not just an uninspiring activity."

The perception of farming as an unappealing way to make a living is apparently hurting the advancement of agriculture in Africa. While some network members questioned the meager livings and small rewards reaped by today's African farmers, Ayer calls agriculture "an exciting and successful livelihood." He's working with African youth groups to convey that message.

"We present a modern customer experience, conduct trainings about modern methods, demonstrate new technologies, and teach about other aspects of agribusiness," Ayer said. "This is successful because it presents farming as an exciting livelihood with potential to make a good income through modern business."

Ayer discussed the future of agriculture with an engaged and informed audience. A YALI Network member identified with a livestock operation endorsed Ayer's recommendations for African farmers to rush into the future.

"It is time we embraced innovative, formal and value-adding approaches/practices if we are to think of and realize significant progress in our naturally-endowed agro advantages and prowess as a continent," wrote a YALI member associated on Facebook with ZamGoats Product Innovation.

But getting started in a productive enterprise takes money. Probably the most frequently asked question in the Facebook chat: "Where do I get the start-up capital?"

Ayer has heard that question a lot. Besides helping beekeepers get started, he also works with Farm Shop, a social enterprise devoted to helping farmers access commodities and supplies they need to increase productivity and expand their enterprises.

"You can first inquire about whether there are local government grant programs that could support your start-up," Ayer responded to the finance question. "There may also be NGOs operating in your areas that would be interested to support the start-up of your venture. Many private foundations offer grants to small organizations and are becoming increasingly interested in agribusiness as a livelihood opportunity."

Raising the money to get started is the obvious problem, but Ayer urged small farmers to pay attention to something they might overlook. Are you sure the customer wants what you're producing?

"Do not assume you know what they want. You have to speak to many of them, and really listen," Ayer advised. "Ask open-ended questions about what challenges they are facing, or concerns they have, or what they feel is missing in their lives."

Find out what the customer wants, find a way you can deliver it, and you've made a loyal customer, Ayer advises.

Identifying the specific demands in every step of your production process is the best way to successfully ensure that you will be able to deliver the product your customer wants.

"Before launching any project or business, it's important to research whether the raw materials for production are readily available, how the infrastructure of transportation, storage, and packaging is developed; and to fully understand the possible markets for the product."


Packaging design may not be a farmer's strongest skill, but that's another important detail in the delivery process, Ayer said, if your product is going to stand out from the competition.

By paying attention to each of these details, by imposing standards of accountability and traceability, Ayer says an agricultural producer will also be able to insure product quality is maintained. Certainty and quality at every step allows the farmer to offer a consumer his product with pride and assurance.

Farmers Turn to Conservation Tillage to Boost Soil Health

More and more African farmers have turned to conservation tillage to maintain the health of the soil in their fields.

According to the University of Minnesota, which cooperates on agricultural research with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, conservation tillage is any method of soil cultivation that leaves residue from the previous season's crop — for instance, maize stalks or wheat stubble — on a field before and after planting the next season's crop. Traditionally, farmers ploughed residue back into the soil before planting a new crop.

Maize grows in rows surrounded by  residue from last season's crop.

Conservation tillage, which has gained in popularity worldwide in recent decades, improves on the traditional method because it enables roots to better capture plant nutrients and water, enhancing crop growth in dry periods or in dry soil. In the long term, it helps communities develop resilience to weather extremes that cause fluctuating growing conditions, according to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) promotes conservation tillage as a way to protect soils from erosion leading to desertification. "The current rate of soil degradation threatens the capacity of future generations to meet their needs," states the agency, which adopted 2015 as the International Year of Soils.

Conservation tillage methods include no-till, strip-till, ridge-till and mulch-till.

- No-till and strip-till involve planting crops directly into residue from the previous season's crop that hasn't been tilled (no-till) or has been tilled only in narrow strips with the rest of the field left untilled (strip-till).
- Ridge-till involves planting row crops on permanent ridges about 12 centimeters high. The previous crop's residue is cleared off ridges into adjacent furrows. Maintaining the ridges is essential.
- Mulch-till is a method that leaves at least 30 percent of the soil surface covered with crop residue.

Research shows that conservation tillage also benefits the environment by:

- Reducing soil erosion by as much as 60 percent, depending on the tillage method and amount of residue left to shield soil from rain and wind.
- Adding organic matter to soil.
- Decreasing farmers' expenditures on fuel and planting because fewer tractor trips across the field are needed.

- Reducing potential air pollution from dust and diesel emissions.
- Reducing soil compaction that can interfere with plant growth.

As an added benefit, crop residue provides food and cover for wildlife, while buffers like grass strips and forests adjacent to waterways defend against water pollution by trapping and filtering any sediment that does leave the field.

Change Our World for the Better: Careers in Agriculture

“There are still numerous untapped opportunities [in agriculture] for passionate young Africans.”

— Ndidì Nwuneli

Nigerian businesswoman Ndidì Nwuneli believes that Africa’s agriculture sector “presents unique opportunities for young African leaders who want to serve as change agents on the continent.” Nwuneli co-founded AACE Food Processing and Distribution Ltd. and is a partner in Sahel Capital Partners in Nigeria.

According to the World Bank, agriculture is essential for sub-Saharan Africa’s growth and for achieving the goal of halving poverty by 2015. The sector employs 65 percent of Africa’s labor force and accounts for 32 percent of the region’s gross domestic product. Increased agricultural production is expected to continue to support growth in Africa’s economy, the bank reports.

Ndidì Nwuneli



Women’s advocate and agribusiness specialist Ruth Oniang’o shares Nwuneli’s belief that agriculture makes a good career choice. “Young people have a great opportunity to create jobs and to contribute to feeding the continent in a sustainable way. Agriculture is now great business,” she said, citing growing global focus on hunger and malnutrition.

Oniang’o founded the Rural Outreach Programme in Kenya, an advocacy group for women and youth in agriculture. She is an honorary professor of nutrition at the Great Lakes University of Kisumu, Kenya; editor-in-chief of the African Journal of Food, Agriculture, Nutrition and Development based in Nairobi; and chair of the Sasakawa Africa Association, which focuses on agricultural development in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Mali and Uganda.

The agricultural experts welcomed queries for advice for members of the YALI Network.

Nwuneli says that she is “excited about the impact that young Africans” might make through the leadership, partnership and mentoring programs available through the YALI Network and the Mandela Washington Fellowship program.

Ruth Oniang’o



“I urge [YALI Network members] to use the amazing exposure, training and networks that you have gained through YALI, coupled with your talents, time and energy, to change our world for the better,” Nwuneli said. “I pray that you will find your life’s purpose early in life, and that you will pursue it passionately, diligently and ethically.”

Nwuneli urges African youth to consider careers in agriculture as entrepreneurs or employment with an agribusiness or in public policymaking. For those considering starting their own companies, “There are still numerous untapped opportunities for passionate young Africans who want to engage across the agricultural value chain from inputs, to production, to post-harvest, storage, logistics, processing, distribution, and information and communications technology,” she says.

“If you are passionate and resilient, you will ultimately enjoy the fruits of your labor,” she states.

“There are many multinational and indigenous companies and civil society organizations in the agribusiness sector that are desperately looking for hardworking and committed employees with strong ethical values,” Nwuneli says.

“These companies are interested in hiring young Africans, regardless of their education background or work experiences, provided they have a strong interest in learning more about the agricultural sector and taking on the challenges and opportunities that the sector presents.”


In the area of policy, Nwuneli says, “there is still a strong need for reforms in the agricultural sector within countries and across regions in Africa. African youth who are passionate about policy reforms can serve as advocates in the public sector, pushing for an enabling environment for agribusinesses to thrive [and] necessary investment in infrastructure.”

“The time for Africa is now,” Oniang’o adds.

Small Farmers Face Opportunities and Challenges

By Madison Ayer, Executive Chairman of [Farm Shop](#) and Chairman and CEO of [Honey Care Africa](#)

Smallholder farmers working in rural areas dominate agribusiness in Africa. The need around the

world for more food and more diverse types of foods gives these small farmers great opportunity, but the challenges they face are significant also. 


At Honey Care Africa, we partner with smallholder farmers across East Africa to strengthen incomes and expand Africa's honey output through sustainable beekeeping. We understand the problems facing small producers and have a rich history in helping them overcome these challenges.

We have discovered that understanding both inputs and outputs distribution is key to success in agribusiness, so we work to support farmers in learning about and adapting to these methods.

Inputs. Poor inputs — seeds, plant material, water, fertilizers and pesticides — and farming methods keep African smallholder farmers far below the world averages for agricultural productivity.

- *Working with smallholders:* It is common practice for small-scale producers to enter contracts for product delivery to the companies who use and market raw agricultural products. These arrangements are called “outgrower” schemes or direct buying. These agreements make smallholder farmers critical components for agribusinesses. Both partners need to make efforts to build trust and loyalty in their relationships and to work effectively in a network of producers.
- *Quality strategy:* A farmer must produce something of value to have a competitive advantage in his market. People want to eat good, nutritious food that has been sustainably produced. Agricultural products must be good quality, and the grower must know how to control that quality. The grower must also be well-versed in understanding and meeting any certification requirements. Meeting those standards is the best way for the grower to establish product quality and credibility with buyers and other contractual partners.
- *Logistics, transport and storage:* Most farming is done in rural areas, far from the established infrastructure of city centers. Farmers must establish supply sources and routes for all those things they need to produce a crop. They must identify and account for the costs of transport and develop backup plans for those occasions when weather and conditions might impede delivery.
- *Modern farming methods:* Many high-productivity and sustainable agricultural practices have been developed in the world, but most African production is still very traditional. Farmers need to have information sources to better understand regional or global trends in their specialties. They need to stay up-to-date with the latest training and production techniques.

Outputs. Farmers must have a keen vision of their customers, what they need and how to communicate with them.

-  *Customer insights:* Producers can't assume that a great product will have buyers lining up at the door. Farmers must clearly identify their customers' needs and the types and volumes of products that they are likely to buy. The farmer needs to understand why customers are interested in their raw materials and what they'll be doing with the commodities.
- *Product-market fit:* By studying needs and behaviors of your prospective buyers, you can get to market acceptance of your product faster. Remember that changing behaviors is difficult, time-consuming and expensive. It is easier to change your product. The successful farmer will offer a product that a chosen customer thinks is truly valuable.
- *Distribution channels:* Once a target customer is identified and the marketability of the product is established, the producer needs to figure out how to get the product to the customer. This is hard

work, scrapping in the streets to build distribution systems and convince buyers to buy. A producer must assess the distribution of customers and the difficulties of delivery conditions and decide how marketing, advertising and promotion might aid sales.

- *Unit economics:* Once the producer identifies the customers and how to reach them, ensuring that the delivery systems are affordable is critical. The successful farmer is going to be obsessive about the unit economics of the product. To succeed in agribusiness, the producer must scale production and distribution and make a profit. Consider everything: cost of goods, packaging, wastage and product replacements.

At Honey Care Africa, we see an exciting future as we lead Africa into the global honey market. The same opportunities are available to other African agricultural sectors.


Madison Ayer is the chairman and CEO of [Honey Care Africa](#), producing and distributing trusted, pure honey through a network of thousands of smallholder farmers in Kenya, South Sudan and Tanzania. Ayer is also the executive chairman of [Farm Shop](#), providing smallholders with farm inputs through a modern retail platform and with franchised shops in villages in rural Kenya.

[Blog Aims to Shape Conversation About Agriculture](#)

Kenyan farmer David Mwenda wants to “shape the conversation” about the future of African agriculture.

The 29-year-old African leader believes “the future of agriculture lies in the hands of youth.” To support his conviction, he created [Foundation for Young Farmers](#), a blog that in July won the Youth in Agriculture prize at the Fin4Ag International Conference in Nairobi. Fin4Ag, With the theme of “revolutionising finance for agri-value chains,” the conference brought together investors and people with ideas for ways to boost agricultural production and improve food processing and distribution.

In his blog and on [Twitter](#), Mwenda, a YALI Network member, is building an online community of youth who value agriculture as a viable and needed profession. With an active online presence, he coaches his audience about the benefits of sustainable farming practices like mixed farming — or growing crops along with raising livestock — and methods that conserve water like no-till farming.

Two children pushing wheelbarrows 
through garden (Courtesy of Foundation
for Young Farmers)

“We try to change their current practices into agribusiness and to create a source of income and employment,” he says.

Mwenda wants his blog to provide information to help link farmers to markets, teach them to keep accurate farm records and to handle food properly, and encourage organizations to come together to provide young farmers with equipment like tractors.

On his two hectares, Mwenda raises dairy cows, sheep, rabbits, chickens and bees and grows a variety of vegetables. He wants his farm to eventually be a “one-stop demo farm” for youth to visit and see modern sustainable agriculture practices.

He reminds YALI Network members considering a future in agriculture that “the most important trait for success is perseverance. “Bigger rewards will ultimately be,” he says to his readers, many of whom were raised on subsistence agriculture. “Agriculture can be a gold mine for young entrepreneurs.”

Mwenda’s blog has become a platform for young Africans engaged in agriculture to discuss their shared problems and to look for solutions. The blogger responds to readers’ comments and uses their comments as starting points for additional entries.

Among the comments the blog has received are:

- “Young people are starting to gain interest in agriculture. They, however, need a platform where they can share their stories, be encouraged and given opportunity to learn. I support this blog because it is showing and highlighting these experiences.”
- “We all need food for our survival and therefore young farmers and agriculturalists play a major role in making sure demand for food is met on [a] daily basis. ...This can be achieved through blogs, forums involving local people and farm exhibitions.”
- “Agriculture is widely viewed [as] an occupation for the elderly or retired in rural areas. This idea has to change.”
- “We are still at the first stage of changing minds. ... The youth will embrace this.”

Read Mwenda’s blog [Foundation for Young Farmers](#) to learn more about why agriculture is a smart career choice or join the conversation to discuss ideas and solutions you may be looking for in your agribusiness.

Cassava is ‘Hidden Gold,’ Kenyan Says


“It is the highest time for young Africans to take the leadership in many sectors of the economy.”

— Nickson Muturi

Creative entrepreneurs like YALI Network member Nickson Muturi know how to get the most from

the resources they have.

Muturi, a 24-year-old cassava farmer and recent graduate of Kenya's Egerton University, founded Bites Cassava Millers Ltd. in Nyeri, Kenya. In 2013 he began to explore ways to extract extra value from cassava, a staple that many considered "poor man's

Nickson Muturi harvests cassava on his  farm in Kenya.

food." In the process, he developed ways to turn cassava into flour and inexpensive animal feed. His work earned him a 2014 Agribiz4Africa award.


Cassava is a tuberous plant, rich in carbohydrates. Muturi considers the tuber "hidden gold" and wants to tell "as many people as possible, especially those in harsh climatic conditions, how they can use cassava to transform their lives."

He used some of his award money to purchase cassava stems, which he gave to skeptical farmers to plant. He reaches out to other farmers through local media and mobile phones.

To produce flour from the tuber, Muturi cuts cassava into small pieces and soaks the pieces in water to clean them of any chemicals. He then adds a sodium preservative, puts the pieces into polythene bags and places the bags in the sun so the pieces will dry. The drying method is "environment-friendly and makes the drying process faster," he says. He then mills the dry pieces into flour and sieves it to remove large particles.

Muturi uses the plant's leaves and stems for animal feed. "I ensure that nothing goes to waste," he says, adding that his methods can be applied to other foods like rice, yams, maize, millet and sorghum.

Poultry farmers are buying the animal feed, and bakeries and other food service providers are buying the cassava flour Muturi produces.

Muturi cuts cassava stems for animal  feed.

Like any entrepreneur, Muturi has encountered challenges. "Many people thought that as a university student, I was not supposed to be working in the agricultural sector," he says. "I have proved that nothing is impossible and that farming is cool and sexy."

Muturi says the YALI Network has exposed him to other young Africans' ideas: "I get a lot of inspiration from their stories."

He says his professional goal is to develop work skills that reflect determination, adaptability and integrity. On a personal level, he aims to expect less and give more to society. He used another portion of his award to pay the school fees of two women working toward certificates in coffee growing.

"I think it is the highest time for young Africans to take the leadership in many sectors of the

economy. They have the energy and capability to drive these sectors to great success,” Muturi says.

Agribiz4Africa aims to generate ideas that can transform agricultural productivity and rural economies and create jobs. The competition is sponsored by the agricultural company Syngenta.

YALI Network Shares Year-End Reflections

Reflecting over the past year, members of the YALI Network Facebook community shared their thoughts and aspirations in response to the question “How do you define success?”

“To me, success is being able to rise above the narrow confines of my individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all Humanity,” wrote Nyasha Shoriwa from Zimbabwe.


Photographer Vince Ras Otti, writing from Kenya, had a similar definition:

“Success is bringing the people together and embracing humanity.”

Building a life that is based on a higher purpose than the self is another goal shared by YALI friends on Facebook.

“Success is knowing what you are born to do — your purpose of being on this earth — and working in that regard to impact the lives of the people around you, your environment and the world at large,” wrote Prosper Dzitse from Accra, Ghana.

The theme of persistence in the pursuit of one’s goals appeared to be a resounding aspiration among YALI Facebook friends.

Graduates of the Aiyedere 
Ajibola Senior Secondary
School celebrate their 2014
success.

“Success is being able to believe in your goals and dreams and pursue them till they become reality,” wrote Sindiswa Olivier from South Africa. He said your ability to chase “doubt and negativity out from your mind” and remain confident in your beliefs is another demonstration of success.

Nigerian Obiora Obetta observed that success “encompasses all breakthroughs and all failure from which you garner invaluable experiences for better result.”

Fred Valentim is a native Angolan living in Paraguay during 2014. “Success means to keep moving with our thoughts whether we do well or not, just moving forward for a good purpose. ... Success

means helping others dealing with failures [and] thinking better for a future of tomorrow.”

YALI Facebook friend Nkocngphile Davies Nkambule of Swaziland posted,

“Achieving dreams that seem to be impossible, that’s how I can define success.”

YALI Facebook friends clarified their views on success as a year-end exercise, but they also reflected on the life lessons that came to them over the past 12 months. From Kenya, Benedict Muyale Ben said, “Patience pays — you don’t have to be great to get started, but you [must] start to be great.”

Atiol Oduho, also from Kenya, advised, “Procrastination is the enemy of progress. Self-doubt is an obstacle to your potential. Being true to yourself is all the fuel you need for the success in any of your endeavours.”

Sudanese Altayeb Elsheikh closes the YALI Network reflections on 2014 with concise wisdom that shone most brightly through his year: “Keep learning, keep doing and keep improving.”

Go back to the [YALI Network Facebook community](#) and start networking!
